

THE FOREIGN SCENE

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Viet Nam:

Violence and a New Leader

Maj. Gen. Khanh on Tuesday gave up the presidency of South Viet Nam under pressure from rioting Buddhists and student groups. On Thursday, he and two other generals agreed to form a triumvirate, but yesterday a civilian, Dr. Nguyen X. Oanh, a Khanh man, was made caretaker Premier.

The first small signs began appearing early last fall, shortly after the overthrow and murder of President Ngo Dinh Diem, the last popularly elected head of the government of South Viet Nam.

Last week, the handwriting was on the wall in letters so high that even those with half an eye could read it:

Barring a near-miracle or an unexpected cataclysm in Hanoi and Peking, the currently organized South Viet Nam-United States effort to defeat the Viet Cong Communist guerrillas is headed for defeat.

The United States has chosen a course which, in effect, places one foot in and the other foot out of the war in that Southeast Asian country. Despite heavily increased United States economic and arms aid—now at a rate of at least \$700 million a year—a boost in the number of American military “advisers” and more influence in decision-making, there have been three new national governments in Saigon since last November 1. Meanwhile, the enemy has grown bolder, stronger and more numerous.

Victory in Doubt

Obviously, no official in the Johnson administration is going to speak pessimistically in public—and perhaps they shouldn't, lest the morale in South Viet Nam dip even further. (There is a feeling in some quarters, however, that the American people have not always been given the full facts on the increasingly grim situation).

But, even before the latest

government upheaval in Saigon, a member of the Central Intelligence Agency's Board of National Estimates concluded in a scholarly study entitled “Trends in the World Situation” that there “remains serious doubt that victory can be won (in South Viet Nam)” and that the situation there is “very fragile.”

The paper, written by Walter Matthias and dated June 9, 1964, was released by the State Department for last Sunday's newspapers when it was learned that the Chicago Tribune had obtained a copy of it. Other members of the CIA Board read the report and approved it in general terms.

Ousted President

Mr. Matthias suggested that a “prolonged stalemate” might be attained if large-scale United States aid continued and, ironically, “if further deterioration within South Viet Nam is prevented.”

The “further deterioration”, unhappily, came last week.

On August 16, Premier Khanh, moving with the knowledge and, presumably, the approval of Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor, United States Ambassador, and the Johnson administration, ousted the popular figure-head President, Maj. Gen. Duong Van Minh, the man who led the revolt against President Diem, and took the post himself. He also drew up a new constitution and assumed near-dictatorial powers.

Johnson Sent Message

President Johnson, who is not always cautious politically, sent the following message to Gen. Khanh:

“Please accept my congratulations and warm best wishes on your assumption of the office as President of the Republic of Viet Nam. I wish you every success in your task of consolidating the freedom and independence of the Republic of Viet Nam.”

The miscalculation on both sides

was enormous. Almost as soon as the fact of the seizure of greater power by Gen. Khanh was understood, Buddhist and student demonstrators took to the streets in protest.

Gen. Khanh, acting anything but like an “Asian strongman,” tried to conciliate the opposition groups. Failing in this, he allowed them to go on a rampage while his police and army did hardly more than look on. He was plainly seeking to avoid the use of repressive measures such as those which the ill-starred Mr. Diem employed in similar circumstances last year.

Clashes in Saigon

At the same time there were armed clashes between Buddhists and Catholics in Saigon and in the northern city of Danang. The Catholics are backing Gen. Khanh, a Buddhist, but the Buddhists assert that the general has kept Catholic elements of the Diem regime in the civil service and that they were discriminating against the Buddhists. Mr. Diem was a Catholic.

By Tuesday, it was evident that Gen. Khanh's tactic of letting the demonstrators blow off steam was not only not working but that the opposition was so strong that he would have to give ground. Consequently, the Military Revolutionary Council, the ruling group which Gen. Khanh headed, announced that it had repealed the August 16 constitution and would call a general assembly of the council to elect a new leader for the nation.

But the military group could not agree on a leader; instead it named Gen. Khanh, Gen. Minh and Lt. Gen. Tran Thiem Khiem, the former Defense Minister and a Roman Catholic, as a ruling triumvirate to serve until a national convention could elect a new President within 60 days.

There were reports from Saigon—denied in Washington—that Gen.